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ABSTRACT

Recognition of the need for lifelong learning that is accessible to all Australians underpins the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system. The Australian Qualifications Framework is a nationally consistent framework that allows for credit transfer and articulation between Australia's schools, VET, and universities. The Australian system of VET has been moving toward lifelong, competency-based training designed to equip Australians for the world of work, enhance their labor market mobility, achieve equitable outcomes in VET, increase investment in training, and maximize the value of public VET expenditure. Achievement of these objectives is being supported by the Australian Recognition Framework and Training Packages. Emerging challenges for the Australian system of lifelong skill training include the following: globalization, rapidly advancing information and information and communication technologies, market reform and the need for greater quality and flexibility, and restructuring of the labor market. To assist in achieving the central objectives outlined in Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003, Australia is taking the following actions to improve and enhance community and industry attitudes toward training: (1) developing seamless pathways that link the sectors of postsecondary education; (2) raising and improving awareness of VET; (3) raising the National Qualifications Profile; (4) expanding flexible delivery; and (5) making a strong commitment to research, development, and innovation. (MN)

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Providing Life-long Skill Training through an Integrated Education and Training System: The Australian Experience

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Life-long learning makes an invaluable contribution to the personal, social and economic development of individuals and society. The philosophy articulated in APEC's paper on human resource development (1) argues the need for workers to constantly update their skills, "to survive, and profit, in the global economy, workers need to be educated, re-educated and educated again". Education is about inclusiveness, and is essential for improving lives and enhancing economic prosperity. In the long term it is hoped this will help reduce poverty, ignorance, and oppression and lead to a better society for tomorrow.

The Delors Report, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, established a new intellectual environment for discussion and debate in education for the next decade. It expresses an uncommon commitment to the importance of education for personal and social development. Education enables a nation to provide for its people an avenue to redress the hardships dealt by inequity and oppression. It empowers people, individually and collectively, to fulfill their potential, to contribute to society, and to extend the opportunities available to their children.

The Australian philosophy reflects that articulated in the APEC paper and in the Delors Report. The recognition of the need for life-long learning - accessible to all Australians - underpins the Australian Vocational Education and Training system. Vocational Education and Training (VET)(2) must benefit our people, labour market, society and the economy. Most importantly, we must remember that education is about people and how they learn.

There are many examples of systems developments which aim to provide life-long skill training through an integrated education and training system. This paper explores the Australian experience in providing an overview of recent reforms and the emerging challenges.

The Australian Context

Australia is a federation consisting of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Geographically isolated, we are populated by persons from a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Although a significant number of Australians reside in the major capital cities, the remainder of the population is dispersed across Australia's large landmass. These characteristics have meant that educational strategies must be able to accommodate a multiplicity of learning requirements. Over the last fifteen years the nature of the economy has changed from reliance on primary resources and manufacturing to more dependence on service and knowledge based industries. These changes have created a need for the Australian labour force to be increasingly mobile, and new figures show that Australians change careers an average of three times in their working lives. This further exemplifies the need for life-long learning to be an integral part of the

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1 APEC Human Resource Development Industrial Technology Network web site - http://www.apec-hurdit.org

2 Vocational Education and Training is how Australians refer to Technical and Vocational Education.

Australian approach to education and training.

Total POPULATION	**18.5 million**
LABOUR FORCE population (3)	**9.2 million**
EMPLOYED population	**8.4 million**
School students (4)	**3.2 million**
Vocational education and training students (government funded)	**1.45 million**
University students	**650,000**

Australia has three currently distinct educational sectors: the schools sector which provides basic and **preparatory education from years 1 to 12; the** vocational education and training sector; and the university sector.

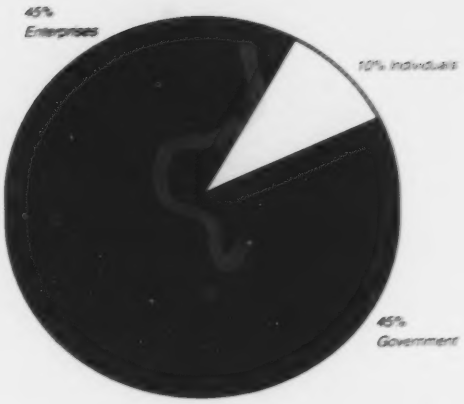
Current Sectors:

Schools	Vocational education and training	**Universities**

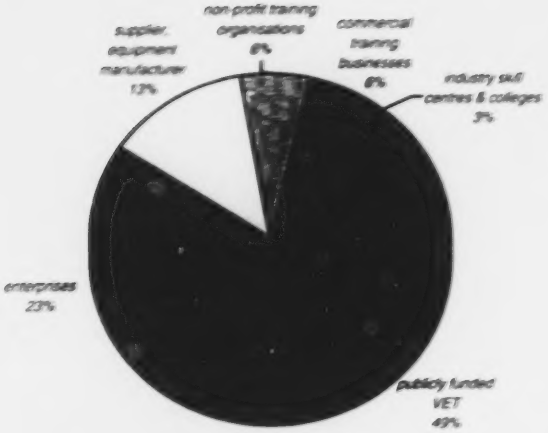
The sectors responsible for the funding and **delivery of vocational education and training in** Australia are detailed in the two charts below. **Currently, industry and government provide equal amounts of funding, with the remainder coming from individuals. Nearly half of all vocational** education and training programs are delivered by publicly funded institutions.

3 Includes employed and unemployed (approx. 800,000) persons

4 Secondary school students make up 1.3 million (roughly 40%) of this figure



Who FUNDS ?

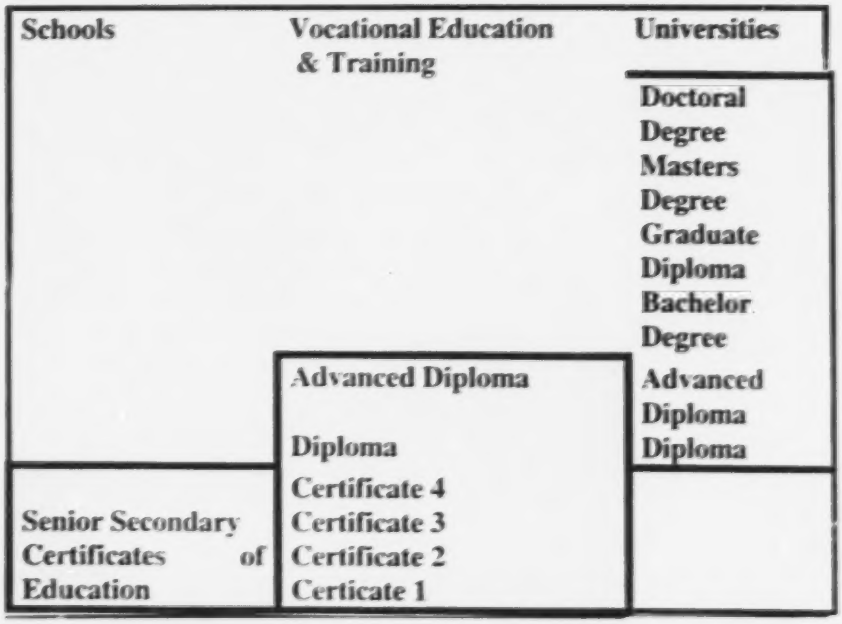


Who DELIVERS?

Australian Qualifications Framework

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a nationally consistent framework that allows for credit transfer and articulation between qualifications. The comprehensive framework spans all education sectors - schools, VET, and higher education. It covers all qualifications recognized in post-compulsory education, and consists of guidelines that define each qualification along with principles and protocols covering articulation, issuing of qualifications and transition arrangements. The many pathways for learning promotes flexibility and provides individuals with options to pursue life-long learning in a manner suited to their needs and at the desired levels. Although each sector has a distinct identity and focus, credit transfer and articulation arrangements facilitate individuals' ability to move through these sectors, a key feature of Australia's approach to life-long learning.

The twelve levels of qualifications are shown below, grouped according to the sector in which they are issued.



International Comparisons

An international comparison of Australia's education sectors is depicted in the charts below. In terms of the proportion of the population who have completed a degree in the university sector, Australia is above the OECD mean and ranks seventh out of the 26 OECD member countries. Overall however, Australia is below the OECD mean in terms of post-compulsory educational attainment, and ranks eighteenth.

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Working Age Population with Post-compulsory Qualifications: Country Profiles and

Rankings (1996)

Post Compulsory Ranking

Country	Profile	Rank
United States	85.7	1
Czech Republic	84.4	2
Norway	81.6	3
Germany	81.5	4
Switzerland	80.2	5
Canada	78.4	6
United Kingdom	76.3	7
Sweden	74.2	8
Poland	73.7	9
Austria	71.3	10
Finland	66.8	11
Denmark	66.1	12
Hungary	63.2	13
Netherlands	62.5	14
Korea	61.1	15
France	60.2	16
New Zealand	60.2	17
Australia	57.0	18
Belgium	53.5	19
Ireland	50.2	20
Greece	44.2	21
Italy	38.2	22
Spain	30.2	23
Luxembourg	29.3	24
Portugal	20.4	25
Turkey	17.0	26

University degree Ranking

Country	Profile	Rank
United States	25.8	1
Netherlands	22.5	2
Korea	19.0	3
Canada	17.3	4
Norway	15.6	5
Denmark	15.3	6
Australia	14.8	7
Hungary	13.4	8
Sweden	13.4	9
Germany	13.1	10
Spain	12.8	11
United Kingdom	12.8	12
Greece	12.0	13
Finland	11.9	14
Luxembourg	11.4	15
New Zealand	11.3	16
Ireland	10.7	17
Belgium	10.7	18
Czech Republic	10.4	19
Poland	9.9	20
France	9.7	21
Switzerland	9.5	22
Italy	8.1	23
Portugal	7.5	24
Turkey	6.3	25
Austria	6.1	26

Evolution of the Australian VET System

The Australian Federation has a strong tradition of vocational education and training, but for many years vocational education and training was confined to a narrow range of qualifications offered by state-based government Technical and Further Education institutes. In 1974 a national review set in place the beginnings for a national vocational education and training system, which has grown significantly and now features a wide range of providers.

At the national level is the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). Established in 1994, ANTA is a Commonwealth statutory authority headed by an industry led Board that advises Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers on how to best achieve a national focus for the VET system. The Ministers (collectively known as the ANTA Ministerial Council) are responsible for final decisions on strategic policy and planning, funding, and national objectives and priorities. The importance of the ANTA Board in the policy process recognizes the pivotal role industry now plays in the Australian system.

State and Territory interests are represented by bodies called State and Territory Training Authorities. These authorities address the industry and community training needs of their respective jurisdictions, whilst maintaining a national focus. Through their annual vocational education and training plans they contribute to a national profile of Australia's training needs.

Over the past six years there has been a substantial increase in the number of private providers offering vocational education and training, although Technical and Further Education Institutes remain the largest public provider in Australia. Today however, these Institutes compete with an array of private and other publicly funded providers. This enhanced system provides a range of options for individuals to pursue life-long learning.

A major reform in the Australian system has been the move towards competency-based training. The focus of this approach is to equip people with industry determined skills, the successful

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attainment and demonstration of which entitles the learner to the relevant qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework. Under this regime, the content of training is determined by the needs of industry, and qualifications are issued when skills are attained, not according to predetermined time periods.

Initially, the Australian vocational education and training system was supply (that is, provider) focused and provided for limited industry involvement in the development of training courses that would meet the needs of the future work force. Industry regarded the skills that the vocational education and training system gave people as inadequately aligned with the skills needed by persons in the workplace.

With the introduction of national industry developed competency standards, the needs of industry received greater recognition. However, the government still regulated training by accrediting programs, and trade training was restricted to a relatively narrow range of industries. This approach covered a limited number of industries, and further work was required to ensure that the needs of Australia's rapidly changing work force were met with ensuing improvements in growth and productivity.

The strategic initiatives which now guide Australia's national vocational education and training system are set out in ***'A Bridge to the Future - Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998 - 2003'***. The strategy consolidates the recent reforms and details collective commitment by Australian governments, in partnership with Australian industry, to implementing further reforms to create a vocational education and training system which is responsive to client needs and a cornerstone to life-long skills training. The strategy details the key objectives of the sector and enunciates a vision for the Australian vocational education and training system. This vision is *to ensure that the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry and to provide individuals with opportunities to optimize their potential.*

The central objectives which underpin the vision of the system are:

- equipping Australians for the world of work;
- enhancing mobility in the labour market;
- achieving equitable outcomes in VET;
- increasing investment in training; and
- maximizing the value of public VET expenditure.

To assist in the achievement of these key objectives, Australia's VET system is supported by the **Australian Recognition Framework** and **Training Packages.**

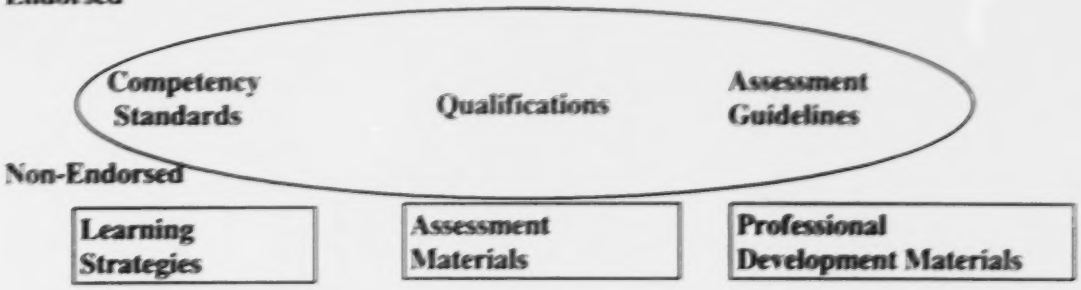
The objective of the **Australian Recognition Framework** and **Training Packages** is to improve the quality of all-vocational education and training products and services, and to develop a more co-operative and united national approach. Together, the Australian Recognition Framework and Training Packages simplify the way training is regulated, define who is responsible for it, describe how quality can be guaranteed, and ensure that nationally consistent policies and procedures are in place.

The **Australian Recognition Framework creates** a national, quality oriented registration process for training and assessment organisations. Within the framework, the new Training Packages

approach complements the traditional approach of State and Territory accreditation of programs. The Australian Recognition Framework facilitates the mutual recognition of registered training organisations, services and products; creates a level playing field between private and public providers; and encourages diversification of recognised products and services.

Training Packages provide the basic building blocks for vocational education and training programs. Training Packages are sets of national training resources consisting of national competency standards, assessment guidelines and national qualifications, and they have laid the foundations for a national system, which is supported by key stakeholders. Developed by industry, Training Packages have also gone a long way to achieving the move away from centralised, limited course accreditation. They bring together, through processes managed by each industry sector, the previously disconnected approaches to standards, programs, qualifications and learning resources. This creates a comprehensive tool kit for learning and assessment leading to nationally recognised qualifications. Individual Training Packages are developed for specific industry areas by national Industry Training Advisory Bodies, with extensive involvement by industry to make sure they meet industry and enterprise needs.
The Australian vocational education and training system is now increasingly characterised by registered providers using flexible, industry designed and nationally endorsed education and training products in ways that most benefit the learner.

Components of a Training Package



Highlights of the Australian System

Complementing these reforms are an array of specific initiatives which, collectively, address the major economic, technological and social trends which affect vocational education and training in Australia.

Australia's political and business leaders have long been concerned with the declining numbers of apprentices and have responded with an initiative called **"New Apprenticeships"**. Building on the existing apprenticeship and traineeship system, this initiative is aimed at modernizing traditional apprenticeships and traineeships, making them more attractive propositions for both employers and apprentices/trainees. Based on industry approved Training Packages, New Apprenticeships are recognised across Australia and are available across a wide range of industries, including both traditional areas and Australia's new generation of industries such as media, entertainment, information technology and hospitality.

New Apprenticeships lead to nationally recognised qualifications, and can be commenced while an individual is still at school. For employers, the government provides incentives to take on an apprentice and each employer has greater autonomy over the content of training and the method

and timing of its delivery.

Both learners and employers are calling for more choice in training. In developing a strategic response to this demand, **'Flexible delivery'** methods are being embraced, encompassing a range of approaches that aim to provide the training that employers and learners want, when they want it, at a convenient location and using a variety of approaches and resources. Flexible delivery in Australia is largely made possible through recent advances in technology, which has enabled more convenient, cost effective and accessible education and training to be provided, especially to those Australians for whom distance is a barrier to traditional learning methods. Nowadays, even when the distance between the learner and the educator is immense, it is not necessarily problematic. Technological advances, coupled with flexible training delivery methods, means that rural Australians will enjoy one of the world's best distance education systems.

In recent years, Australian governments have made significant advances in broadening senior schooling to include vocational education and training in an effort to equip young people with the skills employers need. This major initiative aimed at Australia's youth population is called **"VET in Schools".** "VET in Schools" aims to make school more relevant by helping students prepare for life in the work force. Students are encouraged to stay at school longer and their chances of gaining employment are increasing because they actually have the skills that enterprises need. Continuing participation in vocational education and training after young people leave school is also increasing.

The "VET in Schools" program enables school students to undertake one of three models of practical work related activity:

- full time school students can participate in a vocational education and training program delivered by the school or a public or private training provider;
- students can commence a trainee-ship or apprenticeship involving a training contract and paid employment while still at school; or
- students participate in part time work out of school hours with a formal, structured training component.

Today, many Australian schools now offer comprehensive, relevant vocational education programs to their students in addition to the traditional secondary school senior certificate. To align with "VET in Schools", career and course information is being developed to ensure that Australian school students have the necessary information to make their secondary and post-secondary education choices.

Seamless pathways between sectors mean that people from a range of educational backgrounds can access different types of education. Many of our vocational education and training providers and higher education institutions have successfully cultivated relationships that facilitate articulation from one sector to the other. This applies to movement in both directions and a feature of recent Australian experience is that many university students, on completion of their degrees, are undertaking vocational education and training qualifications. In fact the magnitude of this "reverse articulation" is larger now than the number of students moving on from vocational education and training to university. Various arrangements allow for students with qualifications in one sector to be granted credit towards study or qualifications in another sector. ANTA and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee - the peak Universities body in Australia - have reached an agreement to develop credit transfer and articulation arrangements for qualifications in Training

Packages in areas such as tourism, telecommunications, engineering, information technology, management and administration. Australia embarks upon this major project with a firm view that the distinctiveness of the vocational education and training sector remains a priority and that post-compulsory education pathways should lead to an heterogeneous not an homogenous range of offerings. The educational pursuits of young Australians should not be frustrated by constraints in moving between sectors and this is being achieved by arrangements where the university and vocational education and training sectors are moving towards recognising each others' passports at the borders rather than through uniformity between the sectors.

EMERGING CHALLENGES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN SYSTEM

The Australian system is currently undergoing significant reform. These reforms are not internally driven. Instead, they are in response to external pressures that impact on Australia as a whole. Rapid technological advancements have opened up new delivery and information possibilities; competition between public and private providers for public funds is creating a more competitive and contestable environment across a variety of Australian industries and sectors; strategic alliances, re-alignments, partnerships and mergers are occurring; outsourcing is commonplace; and consumer expectations have matured and strengthened. The forces for change are:

Globalisation

Like many other nations, Australia is facing increasing pressure to be responsive and competitive in a global market. This requires a skilled work force. However, Australia's adult population is currently poorly qualified when compared to international standards. We are 7 percent below the OECD average in terms of the proportion of the population aged 25 to 64 who complete secondary school (53%). Our qualifications profile is very uneven. We have high levels of attainment at university level but low levels for vocational education and training and upper secondary school when compared internationally.

Information and Communication Technologies

Australia has experienced a rapid increase in the availability and take-up of new technologies. This has opened up new delivery possibilities for the vocational education and training sector. In the near future, learning through these technological advances will become enmeshed in our lives, in the workplace, and in communities. The Australian vocational education and training system is currently working with the Information Technology and Telecommunications industry to find ways on how to best meet the skill requirements which are rapidly emerging.

Market Reform - The Need for Greater Quality and Flexibility

To meet learners' needs and build a skilled work force, the Australian vocational education and training sector must be able to competitively deliver high quality products and services in a variety of formats, delivery modes and settings. A challenge for governments and providers is to continue the smooth transition from the traditional behaviour of dictating to the market and erecting artificial barriers, to allowing market mechanisms to determine the distribution of education and training services. In the pursuit of enhanced market competition, It is important that we balance this need with a concern for equality of opportunity. Recent market reforms such as user choice and competitive tendering are the initial steps to achieving a market that is both client responsive,

and that takes account of longer-term social and economic needs. Clients must be informed about their training options and the associated costs and benefits.

Restructuring of the Labour Market

There is an increasing labour market demand for highly skilled technical workers. It is those individuals who possess the skills required, and the ability to continually update them, who will be able to make the most of the opportunities emerging in Australia's rapidly changing labour market. Australia must increase the skills profile of those in the existing work force and encourage life-long learning as an integral element of working life. Only by achieving this will Australia have a work force, which is sufficiently skilled to respond to future challenges, be they global or domestic.

Demand for continuing reform to the vocational education and training sector and its products and services is inevitable. In this "new world" it is imperative that we have a clear idea of our long term goals and how to achieve them. The challenge for the vocational education and training sector is to develop strategies, which enable both economic and social goals to be realised. It is within this context that we in Australia are working towards building a vocational education and training sector that will take us into the next century.

Future Directions for the Australian System

To assist in achieving the central objectives outlined in Australia's **National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998 – 2003,** Australia is implementing a variety of strategies aimed at improving and enhancing the attitudes and values of the community towards training, and modifying the behaviour of industry to encourage an environment conducive to life-long learning and training. This move toward a **training culture** which supports a culture of learning is about establishing a *set of instinctive behaviours, beliefs and values, shared by all Australians - employers, employees, the training community and the wider community alike - which leads them to a life-long interest in vocational education and training and a visible commitment to participating and investing in both formal and informal training.*

We believe that successful implementation of the strategies outlined below, along with those already in place, will foster a culture of training and life-long learning among Australians. It will also shift the vocational education and training system towards a system which is truly responsive to the needs of the individual, and enable us to meet domestic and global challenges "head on".

Seamless Pathways (seamless post-secondary system)

Seamless pathways linking the sectors of Australia's post-secondary education and training system will allow greater choice and flexibility for clients of the system. It will enable learners to move freely in and between sectors while ensuring that outcomes from each are relevant and valued.

A seamless post-secondary system will be achieved by a national policy framework to guide credit transfer and articulation arrangements between vocational education and training and higher education; the expansion of employment based pathways; and comprehensive careers and course advice which enables clients to consider the full range of available options.

Raising and Improving Awareness of Vocational Education and Training

Notwithstanding the marketing activities of all stakeholders, the level of awareness and uptake of vocational education and training options remains low. It is important that Australian communities are well informed about the nature and benefits of vocational education and training. The culture of enterprises, and of society more generally, must also change for there to be a maximization of the value of vocational education and training. There is a need to move industry, enterprises and individuals to a position where vocational education and training has a higher value in business and career thinking, and to encourage a mindset where training is viewed as an *investment*, with associated costs and benefits. It is therefore essential that we move to improve and demystify the status and image of vocational education and training. This will be achieved through the development of a national marketing strategy and by improving the marketing of vocational education and training products and services.

Raising the National Qualifications Profile

It is important that Australia raise its national qualifications profile, if we are to boost our skill levels and become more internationally competitive. The approach we are taking to raise the national qualifications profile involves addressing both the schools sector, and adult skill levels. There is a concern about the current decline in school retention rates among young people, and the increasing number of young people in neither full time work or full time study. We are addressing this by working co-operatively with the schools sector and enhancing the current "VET in Schools" program. We are also promoting greater involvement from industry to support schools and the vocational education and training sector to undertake a broader range of New Apprenticeships.

Targets for participation in education have been set for 19 and 22 year olds. The first target aims to have 95 percent of all 19 year olds participating in or having completed Year 12 or equivalent by 2001. The second target aims to have 60 percent of 22 year olds participating in or having completed education training programs that lead to awards at Certificate 3 level or above by 2001.

Australia aims to increase adult skill levels and boost the recognised skills of older workers to reduce the qualifications gap between younger and older workers. This is being achieved by expanding the opportunities for adults to pursue further education and training through Training Packages. Training Packages being developed will explicitly identify language, literacy and numeracy requirements within standards. This represents a significant focus by policy makers and vocational education and training institutes on language, literacy and numeracy because poor literacy and numeracy skills can act as a barrier to participating in further education and training. There is also a policy focus on education and training gaps where these are restraining competitiveness to ensure that Australia becomes internationally competitive.

Expansion of Flexible Delivery

Participants in the Australian vocational education and training sector have recognised that learning occurs over a lifetime in many settings, including schools, vocational education and training providers, universities, workplaces, community organisations, the home and elsewhere. The increasing utilisation of flexible delivery methods means greater flexibility for individuals in how they choose to learn, and enhances the responsiveness of the vocational education and training sector to the growing demand by employers for on-line training solutions. Flexible delivery allows

a significant focus on and improvement in distance education in Australia and effectively harnesses new technologies to play a key role in the provision of a diverse range of educational services, in a variety of modes of delivery and settings.

Research, Development and Innovation

To ensure that Australia is aware of the latest advancements in vocational education and training, and to assist in improving current practices, a strong commitment to research, development and innovation is coupled with extensive funding of research centres around Australia. This ensures that the planning and implementation of changes to vocational education and training are of the highest possible quality, and industry and client responsive.

CONCLUSION

Australia's vision for life-long learning involves a drive for seamless pathways between sectors, which will mean clear and uncluttered pathways through the maze of educational options and institutions. This creates an environment where all young Australians are able to access post-compulsory education and adults are able to continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge through their working lives. This vision is essential in our pursuit of better lives for all Australians and delivers the additional bonus of assisting in Australia's transition to a knowledge-based economy. This transition is about finding, adopting and implementing strategies for Australia to remain competitive in a rapidly changing world and to enhance our human development, so we can continue to pave a productive path for the nation and our people. Life-long learning is an integral component in the achievement of these goals, as it is about encouraging all Australians to enhance their skills by establishing clear pathways through educational sectors and into the work force. It enables them to fulfill their potential, and contribute to the social and economic well being of the nation. Life-long learning in Australia is about opening doors for all Australians; especially those who have previously been denied the access or the opportunity for further development. The Australian system reflects a collaborative effort by governments and industry to address the needs of individual Australians and provide each of them with the skills and opportunities to enhance their own lives, and create a secure and stable Australia for their children. The Australian approach to VET, as with many other countries, also reflects the spirit of the Delors Report - that learning throughout life can become the means for each of us to establish an equilibrium between learning and working, continued adaptation for a number of occupations and for the exercise of actual citizenship.